

UN Economic and Social Council: UK statement on famine prevention

Thank you to the organisers for convening us to discuss this important issue.

Today, right now, risk of famine is a reality and let's all be clear; it is man-made and it is deeply concerning. A famine is likely already occurring in South Sudan, and famine-like conditions exist in parts of Ethiopia, Yemen and Madagascar. North-East Nigeria is projected to have populations in catastrophic conditions.

The situation in Tigray, Ethiopia is particularly harrowing – I visited recently and the world's worst food crisis since Somalia in 2011 is unfolding. The UK stands with other partners, calling for a ceasefire to bring an end to the conflict.

In response to the increasing risk of famine, the UK launched a Call to Action to prevent famine last September. There are 5 key elements required for any successful international response to do this. First, urgent, prioritised funding is essential from a broader funding base. This is not just about food, but also support to nutrition, health, water, sanitation, and protection.

Second, we should act earlier to save lives and livelihoods. Increasing our efforts on anticipatory action will enable us to mitigate the impact of droughts, epidemics and other catastrophes before they strike, including in protracted crisis and the most fragile setting. Prevention should be central to our thinking and efforts.

Third, we should support countries to strengthen their own crises preparedness, partnering with International Financial Institutions to enable access and efficiency of early response financing.

Fourth, quality data should guide all our actions and be made more readily available.

And finally, promotion of safe humanitarian access and protection of civilians in conflict is vital. Conflict remains the main driver of food insecurity and famine risk. Action at the UN Security Council is needed to address starvation as a method of warfare. There should be accountability of abuses of international humanitarian law. Promoting and measuring access should be a bigger part of diplomatic efforts in conflict resolution; and stabilisation activities: building peace and demonstrating peace dividends will follow helps build trust among communities and belligerents.

The UK will play its part, working with partners across the international system to prevent the risk of catastrophic famine.

Thank you.